Shelter Switch?

Montcalm County board to vote on Humane Society taking over animal shelter

By Elisabeth Waldon | on June 24, 2017

Montcalm County Animal Control Officer Autumn DeVries enjoys the summer sunshine with Jack, a young pitbull rescue dog, outside Montcalm County Animal Control and animal shelter in Stanton. — Daily News/Elisabeth Waldon

STANTON — Montcalm County is looking to get out of the animal shelter business.

The Law Enforcement & Courts Committee voted June 12 to recommend the full Board of Commissioners formally recognize the newly created Mid-Michigan Humane Society (MMHS) and allow them use of the Animal Control building beginning Oct. 1. The full board will vote on the committee’s recommendation during Monday evening’s meeting, which starts at 6 p.m. at the Montcalm County Administrative Building in Stanton.

Angela Hollinshead, director of Animal Control, is also acting president of the MMHS, which was created after last year’s county budget cuts reduced Animal Control to a bare bones operation. The MMHS is a 501c3 and is supported entirely by donations.

“For the last year or so, we’ve been operating Animal Control on a very small budget,” Hollinshead told commissioners. “We’ve had a hard time at our animal shelter just keeping up with basic animal care.”

Hollinshead told The Daily News that after employee wages, Animal Control will have an operating budget of less than $10,000 for the coming year. Animal Control covers 62,000 residents over 700 square miles.
Rachelle Martin is vice president of the MMHS. She told commissioners she has experience in how to handle and train animals, but most people have not gone through training for being a pet owner.

“There’s a lot of animals relinquished to the animal shelter because people aren’t educated or just don’t know how to train their dog,” she noted. “There’s no budget at the animal shelter to bring in a trainer. We’d all love to be able to offer that to the community, but it’s not going to happen (currently).”

Montcalm County Controller-Administrator Bob Clingenpeel recommended commissioners formally recognize MMHS and take steps to transition out of the animal shelter business.

“Budget-wise, we’re not getting any better in terms of non-mandated services,” he said. “The realization that we would continue the system that we have is probably not functional going forward for Animal Control. What has impressed me the most (about the MMHS) is the passion and concern they have for the animals in Montcalm County. I believe they have the expertise, the passion and the conviction to get this done.”

While the MMHS would oversee the care and adoption of animals, the county would still be responsible for the law enforcement side, such as animal cruelty cases and dog bites. The process of how those areas would be covered by law enforcement is yet to be determined, as is the future of current Animal Control employees.

“It appears the intention of these motions is to get the county out of the shelter business and let these folks take over,” clarified Commissioner Ron Baker of Howard City.

“Correct,” replied Commissioner Betty Kellenberger of Carson City.

Search for “Mid-Michigan Humane Society” on Facebook for more information about MMHS.